

## A Small Village Inside a Big City

Fourteen weeks ago, I walked the streets of Barceloneta for the first time. I took a cab from the airport to my new apartment on Carrer del Doctor Gine I Partagas. I remember trying to tell the taxi driver in my best Spanish “Carrer del Doctor Gine I Partagas veinte y siete,” but he couldn’t understand me. I showed him the address and we were on our way. Once we got into Barceloneta I remember looking out the window down the narrow streets and seeing all of the laundry hanging down peoples’ clothing lines. Eventually, the cab driver found my apartment and I met my landlord. He opened the door and went up the tiny narrow stairs and left me to bring my three massive duffle bags up, all by myself. I dragged the bags up each step in the dark, unfamiliar stairwell three separate times. Once settled in, I began to unpack and make this strange place my new, temporary home. Over the past four months I learned all that the incredible neighborhood, Barlceoneta has to offer.

The neighborhood filled with super markets, bakeries, family owned restaurants, small businesses, young couples and families is walking distance from one of the most touristy beaches in Barcelona. However, all of the community like aspects of Barceloneta make the neighborhood feel miles away from the crowded beach. I quickly learned what a great neighborhood I was living in, and all of the kind people I was surrounded by.

On my second day in Barcelona, I woke up to my roommate sick with food poisoning. We were supposed to go to our first day of orientation for our fall semester, but she wasn’t leaving the apartment. I had to get myself ready, go to the closest bakery to buy her a loaf of bread, and make it on time to orientation all before nine o’clock in the morning. After a quick shower, I got dressed and ran to the closest bakery that took credit card. It was no more than a two-minute walk, filled with fresh bread, pastries, and two old ladies working behind the

counter. I got the fresh loaf, ran back to my apartment, and left for orientation. As I was running late, I hopped in a cab hoping to make it there as fast as possible. Once I arrived, I realized I didn't have my credit card and couldn't pay for the taxi. I scrapped together whatever coins I had in my wallet and the driver told me not to worry about the rest. After I found my orientation group and got settled, I began to search for my credit card. I texted my roommate asking if it was at home, and I constantly checked my account to see if it got stolen. I couldn't believe I had already lost it two days in. After orientation, I went back to the bakery from that morning and tried again, in my best Spanish, to ask if I left my credit card. Before I could even finish, the old lady handed me my credit card with a smile. I was so grateful.

As the days went on, I started to fall into my own routine. I became friends with the father and son who owned the local fruit market. I would go to the small store filled with piles of colorful fruit on the right, and vegetables on the left almost every day. They had delicious nectarines, buckets of grapes, and piles of bananas. As the months went on they would tell me what fruit was best at that time, and when the next load would come in. If I didn't have euros to buy the fruit, they would send me to the market next door to pay with credit card. There, I met the store owner who loved to ask me about American politics. He always told me what he heard on the news that day and asked me, 'is it really like this?' Switching between speaking Spanish and English, I tried to answer his questions, and he always laughed, "ciao guapa!" My favorite store owner in the neighborhood was the Grandpa with the bakery across the street from my apartment. The Grandpa seemed to be the happiest and most social man in Barceloneta. He had a small store filled with fresh French bread, a couple kinds of pastries, and tons of packaged candy, chips, and cookies. There were always locals walking in and out of his store with a fresh loaf, or just to say hi. The Grandpa's bakery was almost always open, except for his occasional

fifteen-minute smoke breaks. Although his bread was delicious, and you could smell its freshness from around the corner, most times I went into his store for the massive jugs of water. Regardless, of what I bought, he always greeted me with excitement and asked about my day. I can only imagine how long the Grandpa has had his bakery there, and the amount of lives he's touched with his daily kindness.

Most nights I cooked dinner with the fresh vegetables I would get from the market, and meat from the corner butcher shop. However, on nights I didn't feel like cooking I didn't have to go far for delicious local restaurants. There were many restaurants in Barceloneta although, they all worked around their own hours, opening when they wanted, closing when they wanted and taking some days off. At least once a week I would walk around my neighborhood and find a new place I had never seen open before. One of the most unique restaurants I found in Barceloneta was a small sushi restaurant. As most sushi restaurants offer a similar menu of appetizers, rolls with fresh fish, and mochi for dessert, Kokedama Sushi put a twist on their small menu. They had the normal fried tempura rolls, and rolls with cream cheese, however, they mixed banana, and other fruits with the fresh fish. I can't say that it was my favorite dish and that I will always include banana with my tuna, but it was fun to try. Another restaurant in Barceloneta that I grew to love was Rumban Roll. The small, family owned lunch spot may be one of the most popular restaurants in Barceloneta. Every day between eleven a.m. to five p.m. there was a line out the door of people waiting for their "homemade" meal. Rumban Roll had a fresh spread of different pastas, quinoa, vegetables, meats, and fish on display. For five euros customers chose two dishes to be scooped into their to-go box, and they go elsewhere to eat their meal. My favorite was their quinoa mixed with vegetables, and curry chicken, which I often picked up on my way home from class.

Rumban Roll and Kokedama are only two of the hundreds of restaurants in the neighborhood and along the border of Barceloneta. While the village of Barceloneta is quaint and delightful, not all is calm. Recently, the restaurants on Passeig de Joan de Borbo have had to close their terrace seating due to construction. As the construction comes to an end the district notified restaurant owners that their terrace can now take up 20% of the sidewalk, instead of 50%. With much frustration, the restaurant owners protested in the street of Passeig de Joan de Borbo, stopping traffic and causing disruption. They claim the city is trying to hurt their legal finances while overlooking the illegal activity that occurs all day on the other side of the street. The district is arguing they will no longer have a limit on the number of tables and can increase seats in their space given. There has been no concluding decision as restaurant owners are not willing to settle with the new law.

While living in Barcelona, I spent the majority of my time at the beach, mornings, afternoons, and nights. Coming from the Midwest of America, I was always deprived of unlimited sun, and days spent on the beach. Although it wasn't the 'local' thing to do, I was so grateful I could go to the beach anytime I wanted living in Barceloneta. Every day I passed by the same neighbors, smiling at them and watching as they played with their kids in the street, or cooked dinner for their family with the windows and door wide open. One night, I was walking back from a late-night walk on the beach and heard loud music. As I got closer to the music, I saw the old man that always smiled at me, dancing with his wife in their small kitchen. They were laughing, and singing with the door wide open, enjoying life. It was beautiful. Besides going to the beach to bake my pale skin in the sun, and jump in the cold, salty water, I ran the two-mile sidewalk every day. Whether I ran two miles, or four miles that day I would start and

end my run in the same spot, right next to Restaurant Salamanca. The waiters would say hi as I began my run and would always cheer me on as I finished with an enthusiastic high-five.

I enjoyed living in Barceloneta more than I could've imagined. Living amongst locals in a neighborhood allowed me to understand and be a part of the Spanish culture on a daily basis. Even though I haven't lived anywhere else in Barcelona, I don't think I would've enjoyed my time there as much if it weren't for living in Barceloneta.